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OPENING OF CONFERENCE. NATIONAL OUTLOOK CONFERENCE ON RURAL YOUTH, OCTOBER 23-26, 1967, WASHINGTON, D. C.

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AMERICAN YOUTH HAVE ALWAYS HARBORED DISCONTENT WITH THE STATUS QUO. HOWEVER, IN THIS GENERATION TOO OFTEN HEALTHY DISCONTENT GIVES WAY TO DISENCHANTMENT AND SICK DESPAIR, AND THERE IS AMPLE REASON FOR YOUTH TO BE DISCONTENTED WITH OUR SOCIETY, WHEN WE ARE UNABLE TO MOBILIZE OUR VAST CAPACITIES TO MAXIMUM EFFECTIVENESS. SOME OF THESE CAPACITIES INCLUDE--EXCELLENT EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES, SURPLUSES OF FOOD, AND AMPLE MEDICAL AND HOSPITAL FACILITIES. SOCIETY HAS FAILED TO GIVE YOUTH THE NEEDED INSPIRATION TO FORESTALL THIS DISENCHANTMENT BECAUSE TOO MANY AMERICANS ARE SPENDING TOO MUCH TIME DEGRADING OUR OWN COUNTRY, EVEN THOUGH IT HAS MADE MORE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PROGRESS IN THE LAST SEVEN YEARS THAN ANY ONE COUNTRY IN ALL THE HISTORY OF MANKIND. THE YOUNG PEOPLE OF AMERICA SHOULD REMAIN DISCONTENTED BUT SHOULD NOT LOSE THEIR FAITH OR PERSPECTIVE IN THE FUTURE. THEIR CHALLENGE IS TO BUILD ON WHAT HAS BEEN ACCOMPLISHED IN THE PAST AND NOT DESTROY THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF OUR PAST GENERATIONS. THIS SPEECH WAS PRESENTED AT THE NATIONAL OUTLOOK CONFERENCE ON RURAL YOUTH, OCTOBER 23-26, 1967, WASHINGTON, D. C., SPONSORED JOINTLY BY THE U. S. DEPARTMENTS OF AGRICULTURE, HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE, INTERIOR, AND LABOR, OEO, AND THE PRESIDENT'S COUNCIL ON YOUTH OPPORTUNITY. (ES)

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General Session

Speech presented at
NATIONAL OUTLOOK CONFERENCE
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Washington, D. C.

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OPENING OF CONFERENCE

Honorable Orville L. Freeman
Secretary of Agriculture
Washington, D. C.

I am delighted to welcome all of you to this National Outlook Conference on Rural Youth.

Many of you represent State agencies with deep commitments to improving education, employment, health, and cultural opportunities for youth.

Many others represent key private organizations and agencies that work directly with youth.

And I am particularly pleased to see here so many young Americans themselves.

On behalf of the six Federal Departments and agencies which have taken the lead in sponsoring this conference I bid each of you a most hearty welcome.

This is a truly historic occasion. We are here to set in motion forces that will build new prospects for American rural youth -- and not only for rural youth but for all youth, everywhere, throughout this nation.

I say all youth, because there is no longer any sharp line that divides rural and urban America -- or that separates rural and urban youth. Whatever affects youth in Washington, New York, Chicago, or San Francisco, radiates to some degree into every town, village, hamlet, and farm in America.

And, equally, whatever affects youth in Countryside USA radiates into all of big city America.

This is what makes it so vitally important that we achieve and maintain rural-urban balance in this nation.

In the past 15 years I have had the opportunity to meet or correspond with thousands of young Americans. I like them. I respect them. They haven't turned on and dropped out. They're intensely interested not only in what they can do for themselves ... but in doing what they can for their country.

Among them is a certain discontent, a certain impatience. As well there should be. Among the best of American youth -- those with noble ideals

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and a sense of responsibility -- there has always been discontent with the status quo and impatience to get on with creating something better.

The tragedy of this generation -- as I see it -- is that too often healthy discontent and impatience have given way to disenchantment and sick despair.

In the brief time I have with you this evening, I'd like to address myself to this. I'd like to examine with you the irony of despair and disenchantment in a time when America is moving forward at a pace undreamed of by our forebears.

First of all, let me quickly agree that there <u>is</u> ample reason for discontent with our society.

Here we are, by all odds the richest, mightiest, most productive nation that has ever existed. But somehow we have not yet been able to mobilize our vast capacities to maximum effectiveness.

We have more than enough food to wipe out hunger -- but millions of our people are still undernourished.

We have the capacity to educate not some of our youth -- but all of our youth -- yet we are not doing it.

We have the means to furnish ample medical and hospital care for young and old, rich and poor, country people and city people -- but too many are still denied it.

We have the sources to provide ample job opportunities -- but among some ethnic groups unemployment runs as high as 20 percent. And it's highest among youth.

Who among us would deny that we <u>can</u> wipe out poverty and discrimination -- provide decent housing -- eliminate slums -- reduce crime -- alleviate congestion -- keep our air and water from pollution?

But we are not doing these things as well or as swiftly as we must. So, of course, we are discontented.

Some of these conditions are particularly prevalent in rural America. About two or every five persons on farms have poverty level incomes. One of every three occupied homes in rural America either needs major repairs or total replacement. The 1960 census revealed that more than 30 percent of rural homes did not have hot and cold running water. Some 35,000 rural communities still lack modern water systems and 45,000 need sanitary waste disposal systems.

So there <u>is</u> reason for discontent, and no one recognizes this more than the President. It was he who said: "We haven't been keeping faith with

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"tomorrow -- or with ourselves -- and we ought to realize it."

The young people of America realize it, and much of their discontent -- discontent that sometimes boils over into something worse -- stems from the failure of American society to offer them a challenge and a sense of purpose consistent with their idealism and explosive energy.

And why has society failed to give young people the inspiration they need and deserve? Because too many Americans are spending too much time knocking their own country and too little time doing something about it.

For many, many months, now, we've heard how bad America has become. We can hardly read a newspaper or a magazine, spend an evening watching TV or listening to the radio, see a movie or hear a speech without being told what's wrong with America.

No wonder the healthy discontent of youth is for some turning into sick disenchantment!

Discontent, dissent, constructive criticism ... this we need. Our country has become as great as it is precisely because of this. But what we don't need are Americans who have dropped out, given up, walked away from social, economic, and yes, moral responsibility because they've been sold a bill of goods that there is no hope for their country.

I'm here to tell you that never in history has there been as much hope for America as there is today!

I'm here to tell you that this nation has made more social and economic progress in the past seven years than has ever been made by one country in all the history of mankind!

The young people of America must be told that the important thing is not that all of our problems have been solved nor all of our challenges met ... but that we are moving to solve those problems and meet those challenges. And we are moving faster than ever before.

Just think of what's happened in less than seven years:

We've had the longest uninterrupted business boom in history -- 80 months!

We've gained 7½ million new jobs and cut unemployment in half!

We've had a 51 percent increase in personal income --$180 billion more than we had in 1961. Today Americans have $40 billion more to spend than they had just one year ago!

We've had a 71 percent increase in corporate profits -- after taxes.

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We've had a 56 percent increase in realized net income per farm!

And we've had a 25 percent reduction in poverty!

But the idealism of youth traditionally is not satisfied with mere material gain, thank goodness, so let's consider what we're doing with the prosperity so many -- but not all -- are enjoying.

Are we honoring the demands of the American dream that some day every individual will have a chance, every individual will be of value, no individual will be deprived of what is rightfully his ... where the human spirit is freed, human dignity enhanced, and human potential fully realized?

Tell the disenchanged to ask 40 million older Americans what they think of a medicare program that gave them billions of dollars worth of hospital, medical and nursing home care the first year it was in effect.

Tell the disenchanged to ask a million needy college students, 9 million disadvantaged youngsters, 100,000 graduate students and 2,000 colleges and universities who benefited what they think of the Funds for Education legislation enacted in 1965. The 89th Congress voted more Federal funds for education than all the Congresses that preceded it put together.

Tell the disenchanted to ask a million children who have been given new hope through summer and full-year programs what they think of Head Start, or 85,000 young men and women what they think of the Job Corps they served in, or a million poor youth who were helped to find jobs or were helped to return to school what they think of the Neighborhood Youth Corps program, or 22,000 high school graduates what they think of the Upward Bound program that made it possible for them to go on to college, or millions of others who benefited from any other Anti-Poverty programs what they think of those programs.

Tell the disenchanted to ask the 2 million low income Americans who participate what they think of the USDA's Food Stamp program that enables them to expand their food buying power to nourish their families more adequately.

Tell the disenchanted to ask conservationists what they think of a Congress that passed more conservation, anti-pollution and natural beauty measures than any Congress in history -- Highway Beautification, the Land and Water Conservation Fund, the Water Pollution Control Act, the Clean Air Act Amendments, Amendments to P.L. 566, and authorization of Resource Conservation and Development.

Tell the disenchanted to ask Negroes what they think of the landmark civil rights legislation that did more to right 200 years of wrong than any such laws ever before passed in this country.

And tell the disenchanted to ask hundreds of millions of hungry souls overseas what they think of the Food for Peace and Food for Freedom programs that are providing them with food aid, technical assistance, and self-help inspiration.

My young friends, much of the discontent in America today is inspired <u>not</u> by our failures ... <u>but by our progress</u>!

More than a century ago, Alexis de Tocqueville, that brilliantly perceptive French observer of the American scene, wrote something prophetically appropriate for the mood of the moment in these United States in the year 1967:

"Only great ingenuity," de Tocqueville said, "can save a Prince who undertakes to give relief to his subjects after long oppression. The sufferings that are endured patiently as being inevitable become intolerable the moment it appears there might be an escape. Reform then only serves to reveal more clearly what still remains oppressive and now all the more unbearable. The suffering, it's true, has been reduced, but one's sensitivity has become more acute."

I say to you, the young people of America, keep your discontent. Remain acutely sensitive to that which remains oppressive. Keep your idealism and your determination to forge a better world.

But don't lose faith or your perspective. Build on what has been built before you. Don't tear it down. The Great Society <u>will</u> be built on the New Frontier, the Fair Deal and the New Deal ... but it won't be built in a day, or a year, or a generation. Indeed, it will never be finished. But what is important is that a start has been made ... and the effort must be continued ... by you ... and those who follow you.

This nation is challenged by destiny. More specifically, it is challenged by American youth. Have we the wisdom to use our wealth and resource to enrich, elevate and advance the quality of our civilization? Do we dare to plan for the kind of America that we can proudly pass on to those who will come after us?

We are here at this conference in response to that challenge.

As a first step toward meeting it, we will need to get hard facts and objective appraisals of current conditions throughout this nation. We need to find out what it will take to achieve a renewal -- a rebuilding -- a revival -- a renaissance of opportunity throughout rural America.

This renaissance is our ultimate goal. Can we achieve it? I <u>know</u> we can. It is already well under way.

Spurred by a new spirit, rural America is changing. Scattered across this

country, some 3,200 community resource development committees and roughly 600 multi-county committees are taking positive, effective action to provide jobs, education, training, housing, health, recreation and other facilities and services needed in rural America.

During recent months I have seen dozen of examples of dynamic action in the Midwest, the South, the East, and the West.

We have been advancing as an alternative to megalopoli -- which is the stacking up of human beings layer by layer in giant urban complexes -- the concept of a town-country community. The town-country community is a non-metropolitan district in which villages, towns, a small city or two, and counties having common interests move forward under joint planning and development programs. Some 26 states are already using this concept in their planning programs.

I visited an area in Iowa last June where local leaders and officials of 10 counties have combined to plan for the wise use of the resources in all their counties to improve the economy and enhance living opportunities in the entire region.

A banker in one of the small towns involved on this project told me that hog and cattle production had doubled in his county, jobs in industry had increased from 310 in 1960 to 1,150 today, and income per family had doubled. His bank's lending limit had risen from $20,000 to $80,000.

On that same trip, I visited Tupelo, Mississippi, a city that has made itself the base for an amazing record of economic growth in a 7-county area.

Last month I visited the Congaree Iron and Steel Company in Congaree, South Carolina. Ten years ago, it was a roofless assemblage of used machinery; today it is a thriving industrial plant, with 400 employees and a million-and-a-half-dollar payroll.

People who had fled, jobless, to the big cities a few years ago, are returning to Congaree, because this is where they want to live, and this is where they can get jobs now, thanks to dynamic local people.

These are but a few examples of what is happening in scores of communities in our land. It is thrilling -- inspiring -- to see people and communities spurred by a new spirit, breaking free of the straitjackets of apathy and poverty.

Building on this beginning, I am convinced that in the next decade this nation can, and will, create hundreds of vigorous, viable, growing Town and Country communities.

They will offer almost everything the big cities can provide -- except the

congestion, confusion, crime, ghettos, unemployment, unrest, polluted air, and dirty water that besmirch the typical American metropolis today.

I see a great and promising future for the youth of America -- rural and urban alike -- if only we follow through on the progress now being forged.

This is our dream -- our goal. We <u>can</u> achieve it.

Young Americans, have no fear of the future, now of its challenge and responsibilities. Working together, let us attack the source of our discontent and put America's capacities to work.

Let us keep faith with tomorrow.